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CHALLENGE 60

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GDW

Vampirism is a curse. Make no mistake. I became a night creature six years ago, and have been hating myself ever since. I wish I could die, but I guess that's impossible for the undead.
Klayton Brosner, vampire

umans become vampires by contracting the Human-Meta-human Vampiric Virus (HMHVV), usually as a result of a vampire's bite. Those who possess the virus which causes vampirism usually transform from seemingly ordinary humans into vampires sometime after puberty. As a result, most such cases are quickly discovered.

Awakened Vampires: So-called awakened vampires are usually taken to special research centers where the genetic defects are researched. Life in such centers is understandably horrible. The vampires cannot feed on each other (since their bodies contain no "living" blood). They are fed from bottles of synthetic blood which does nothing but keep them alive for further experimentation. The centers resemble armored prisons, since letting the vampires escape would mean certain death to countless innocents as the vampires assuaged their need to feed.

Created Vampires: Vampires can be created if the parental vampire offers blood from its neck to its victim. The victim must bite the vampire's neck and drink the fresh blood (which only minutes before was the victim's own blood). Then the vampire must cast the spell Create Vampire. Some researchers believe this spell actually passes the HMHVV virus to the victim, but the presence of vampires before the known existence of the virus leaves room for doubt. If the vampire casts Create Vampire and the victim drinks from the vampire's neck, the victim will rise the next night as a fully sentient vampire.

If the victim dies without this process taking place, it will rise as a mindless follower of the parental vampire. The follower will have no Will or Essence, and will follow whatever commands the vampire gives.

Creation of an independent vampire allows the new vampire to continue to use skills it knew before the transition, whereas creation of a follower does not. However, an independent vampire is just that: It is not under control of the the parent vampire, nor is the new vampire bound in any way to the parent. Most new vampires stay with their masters for some time, however, if only to learn the ways of the vampire.

URGE TO FEED

For a vampire, there is no stronger motivation than to feed on the blood of living creatures, especially humans. A hungry vampire is a most dangerous enemy, and a vampire kept close to starvation is unpredictable and vicious. Recent research into mass murders involving mutilations of corpses now indicates that more than a few of these involved carriers of the HMHVV virus on a rampage.

Vampires feed on the Essence of living creatures. Everything living has an Essence, and vampires transfer the Essence to their own bodies by drinking the blood of their victims. Draining a victim of its entire Essence (and blood) kills the victim. Draining some of a victim's Essence (and a portion of its blood) cause weakness and exhaustion. (For example, if a vampire attacks a victim

VAMPIRES!
UNOFFICIAL RULES SUPPLEMENT
By Jeffrey Groteboer

with Essence: 5, but only drinks 2 points worth, the victim has suffered a 40% blood loss.)

Drinking the Essence of a victim does not automatically increase the vampire's Essence. Instead, there are specific times when a vampire may increase its own Essence. Drinking of Essence by a vampire does, however, have certain immediate effects. A vampire's body is usually cold and pale, but after feeding, the warmth of the blood is transferred to the vampire's body, warming the skin and giving it a fresh, pink hue. During these times, vampires look almost human (or metahuman).

Failure to Feed Regularly: A vampire must consume blood equal to its Essence every week in order to remain fully fed. Failure to consume this amount of blood will result in the vampire's weakening. For each consecutive week the vampire fails to feed properly, it loses 1 point of IQ. When a vampire's IQ falls to 0, the vampire goes into a blood frenzy, and kills and feeds on anything it can find until it has consumed triple its Essence. After that, it must rest for at least one day-night cycle before its IQ is fully restored.

INCREASING VAMPIRES' ESSENCE

Vampires can increase their Essence. If a vampire completes an entire decade (520 weeks in a row) without failing to feed fully each week, it gains 1D6 points of Essence and an additional

vampiric ability. Any break in the decade forces the vampire to start over.

Effects of Cybernetics on Essence: Cybernetics reduce a character's Essence. This reduction applies to vampirism as well. A character with an Essence reduced to 2 because of the amount of cyber implants in its body will provide only 2 Essence points to a vampire. Thus, many vampires avoid attacking characters with obvious cybernetic parts.

Added Abilities with Essence Increase: Every time a vampire increases its Essence, it also gains one vampiric ability. Which ability it gains can be the choice of the player or the referee.

INNATE ABILITIES

The following abilities are common to all carriers of the HMHVV virus. They manifest themselves automatically within one week of the virus becoming active in the vampire's body.

Detect Life: This ability functions like the standard spell (*Shadowrun*, page 93), except it does not require casting and does not drain the vampire of Magic points.

Essence Drain: This ability allows the vampire to receive Essence from the victim as a result of drinking the victim's blood. Nonvampires who drink someone's blood receive normal nourishment from the blood but do not drain the victim of Essence.

Immunity: Because they are not living creatures, vampires are not susceptible to diseases, age or pathogens. In addition, they cannot be asphyxiated since they no longer rely on air to breathe.

Move Silently: The ability to move without making a sound includes muffling the crunching of leaves or gravel underfoot, inadvertent squeaks of one's shoes, etc. also includes footfalls and the "thump" which accompanies a jump from a wall or roof.

Sense Strong Essence: Vampires are able to sense and determine the level of Essence equal to or greater than 7. This ability functions at a range equal to the sum of the vampire's Essence and the target's Essence times 100 meters. Thus, a vampire with Essence: 11 could sense a person with Essence: 8 when they are within 1900 meters (1.9 kilometers).

MAGICAL ABILITIES

Vampires can acquire any of the following magical abilities whenever they increase their Essence. This is in addition to any magical abilities they acquire through shamanism or magical research.

Control Animals (Manipulation): *Drain:* Various *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* The vampire can touch the mind of any animals in range and issue them commands appropriate to the level of their intelligence. Dogs, for instance, will respond to "sit" or "attack," but not to "see if anyone's over there." Vampires may control any animal they can see. (Note that fog severely reduces sight, but if the vampire uses thermographic vision, this range can be extended.) The drain is dependent on the size and number of the animals to be controlled—controlling animals which together are less than half the vampire's size is Drain L2. Controlling any number of animals which approximate the vampire's size is Drain M2. Controlling any number of animals which together are larger or heavier than the vampire is Drain S3.

Control Mists (Manipulation): *Drain:* L1 *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* This spell allows the vampire to control the movement and intensity of a mist or fog. It does not allow the vampire to create a fog, but any fog can be controlled, including those which are machine-generated.

Control Shadow/Darkness (Illusion): *Drain:* L2 *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* This spell allows the vampire to control the path of a shadow. By casting this spell, the vampire makes night seem darker and shadows more able to conceal the vampire's presence. The vampire can also control the shape of its own shadow by using this spell, but this requires an additional casting.

Control Thoughts (Manipulation): Functions like the standard spell (see *Shadowrun,* page 97).

Create Vampire (Special): *Drain:* D4 *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Instant *Special Effects:* This spell allows the passing of Essence from the vampire to a victim, thus transforming the victim into a vampire. It must be cast by the vampire at the moment his blood touches the lips of his victim.

Increase Attribute (Health): *Drain:* Various *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* Functions like the standard spells (see *Shadowrun,* page 95).

Sleep (Combat): Functions like the standard spell (see *Shadowrun,* page 92).

Infection (Health): *Drain:* Various *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Various *Special Effects:* Functions like the opposite of Antidote Toxin spell (see *Shadowrun* page 94). The target must be touched for the spell to take effect. A vampire may not cause infections which are stronger than its Essence +10. Thus, a vampire with Essence: 15 could cause an infection of 1D6 damage.

Thermographic Vision (Special): This ability comes to vampires without the need for cyberware. (See page 126 of *Shadowrun.*)

Invisibility (Illusion): Functions like the standard spell (see *Shadowrun,* page 95).

Mesmerize (Illusion): *Drain:* M2 *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* The vampire can mesmerize one individual at a time, causing the victim to become solely preoccupied with the vampire. The effect of the spell resembles a strong hypnotic trance. The victim will stare blindly at the vampire while under the effects of the spell and will obey most commands, such as "come here" or "sit down." Commands of obvious immediate harm to the victim require a success test (Willpower: Difficult). Success allows the victim to break out of the trance.

Pass Without Trace (Manipulation): *Drain:* L1 *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* This spell allows the vampire to pass through underbrush, snow, dirt, grease, etc., and leave no trace. Actually, any trail the vampire would normally leave disappears as it is made, which is why this is a manipulation spell. While the spell only lasts for a limited time, its effects on the terrain through which the vampire passes are permanent (i.e., the trail won't suddenly reappear later).

Regeneration (Health): *Drain:* D4 *Type:* Mana *Duration:* Permanent *Special Effects:* This spell allows the vampire to regrow a damaged or severed part of its body. It will not affect other body parts. Regeneration requires one hour per point of damage sustained to the body part (e.g., if a 15-pint hit severed an arm, regrowing the arm would require 15 hours).

Shapechange: Bat (Transform Manipulation): *Drain:* S2 *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* The vampire transforms its body into that of a vampire bat. In bat form, it has all the abilities of a real bat, including flying and vision by radar. Changing from the vampire's form to bat and back again requires one combat round. A vampire can remain in bat form for a number of hours equal to its Essence.

Shapechange: Mist Form (Transform Manipulation): *Drain:* S3 *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* The vampire transforms his body into a mist of approximately the same size and shape as its normal body. In mist form, the vampire is in possession of all skills and abilities which it possesses in its normal form. Changing from the vampire's natural form to mist and back again requires one combat round. A vampire can remain in mist form for a number of minutes equal to its Essence, beyond which time the vampire begins to lose connection with the physical world. If the vampire remains in mist form longer than double its Essence, it loses touch with the physical world completely. It must then wander the Astral Planes as a wandering creature, and the player surrenders the character sheet to the referee.

Shapechange: Wolf (Transform Manipulation): *Drain:* S2 *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* The vampire transforms its body into that of a large wolf. In wolf form, it has all the abilities of a real wolf, including communicating with other wolves, and heightened smell and hearing. Changing from the vampire's natural form to wolf and back again requires one combat round. A vampire can remain in wolf form for a number of hours equal to its Essence.

Shapechange: Other (Transform Manipulation): *Drain:* Various *Type:* Physical *Duration:* Sustained *Special Effects:* Vampires may be able to shapechange into other animal forms at the referee's discretion. Ω
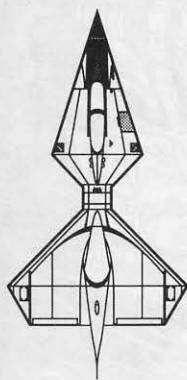
GURPS Gamemaster's Screen

Review by Craig Sheeley.
Steve Jackson Games, Inc.
$8.95.
Two four-page cardboard data screens, one four-page reference insert.
Published in 1991.

The first referee screen published for the rules-heavy *GURPS* game was useful, but somewhat flawed. Attitude tables were not included, and the hit location tables were missing. This screen makes up for it. I'm rather pleased, since I run *GURPS*.

All the maneuvers, hit locations, ranged weapon attacks and critical hits are on one data screen, complete with orange divider lining to make the print easier to read. I noted the addition of the small but quite useful Hits in a Burst Table, for those preferring to hose automatic fire downrange.

The other data screen contains those formerly missing tables for NPC running, jumping (sounds like a track-and-field event, doesn't it?), travelling, administering first aid and making fright checks, plus modifiers for combat in adverse conditions. I do miss the bleeding rules that were on the old referee screen; maybe I can stick that screen in with this one and solve that problem.

The insert is nothing more and nothing less than a character-generation cheat-sheet, listing everything you need to whip up a quick character.

Very nice.

MINIMAL WASTED SPACE

I must complement SJG for not wasting more than one face of this screen set. Of course, one face must be used for the cover art—after all, the cover not only identifies the product, but helps sell it. But unlike other game companies, SJG doesn't use up the back-facing page with more art. The UPC is sandwiched neatly among the critical hit tables. Hooray! Now if we could only get FASA, R. Talsorian Games, TSR, etc. to follow this lead.

EVALUATION

I recommend this screen to *GURPS* referees. It's a good product, at a really fair price—you'd probably pay $10 for something like this from any of the manufacturers mentioned above.

The Rigger Black Book

Review by Craig Sheeley.
FASA Corporation.
$15.00.
Written by Phillip McGregor.
144-page vehicle sourcebook for *Shadowrun*.
Published in 1991.

William Gibson should be mentioned in the credits to this book as the godfather of the concept behind it. The "rigger" character is taken straight from this book *Hardwired*, which followed an adventure concerning a man who was wired with cybernetics that enabled him to control specially adapted vehicles with his mind. All he had to do was socket in, and he literally became the vehicle.

That's exactly the idea behind the "rigger" character in *Shadowrun*. Besides the street samurai, the rigger is one of the few really "straight" believable characters in the game, completely eschewing magic for pure technology and not generally concerned with the silly business of being a fantasy character stuck into a science-fiction background. To a rigger, the world is a pretty dull place until he wires into his rig (sound familiar, *Car Wars* fans?).

The Rigger Black Book does the most logical thing it can do to expand the rigger's background and capabilities—it introduces a lineup of new vehicles! Not all the vehicles are new—the old standbys from *Shadowrun* are here as well. But look closely at their listings—some of them have changed! In addition to showcasing vehicles ranging from street-legal cars, motorcycles (some of them definitely not

street-legal), trucks, vans, hovercraft, aircraft and boats, the book contains revised and expanded vehicle combat rules, plus a good section on new stuff for your vehicle.

Ah, the modifications section. This is the true meat for the rigger. Without the ability to monkey with the stock vehicle, there's not much reason for the book, right? Well, take monkey wrench in hand and go to it. There are plenty of nice gadgets, such as plebeian things like seats, lights and safety devices, as well as such nice bits as turrets, hardpoints, armor, engine modifications, sensors, ECM and ECCM systems, and new weapons.

Be warned: You have to watch this section real close, boyo. The rules are clear and succinct, the gadgets seemingly low-cost and high-performance. But don't be fooled. It's like a kid in a candy store—before you realize it, your modified vehicle will be racking up the nuyen to two or three times the vehicle's original stock cost. It's just so tempting to rifle through the junk you can use to kit that clunky car out to a lean, mean, fighting machine. By the time you get done, not even the manufacturer will recognize it.

A word of warning to other shadowrunners—don't tackle a rigger's vehicle. The new vehicle rules pass the advantage to a person wired into the machine; a good rigger is so fearsome that his vehicle almost becomes a living beast. Faster, bigger and tougher than any mere life-form (except, of course, the dracoforms and the ignorantly huge mutant animals featured in other supplements), a rigger's vehicle will rip up a nonrigged tank. Even a rigger with mediocre skill and good rig-wires is twice as good as a professional driver.

Of course, there are a few rules in the back of the book that other shadowrunners will want to see, too. The group I game with almost refuses to use any fire except burst fire, and called shots are another norm with them. These tactics increase the killing power of the fairly wimpy weapons in Shadowrun, making a burst from an SMG almost lethal. Someday FASA has to issue a supplement compiling these little rules changes into one place, instead of spreading them out over a number of supplements.

SO WHY BUY IT?

The *Rigger Black Book* is *the* supplement for riggers. At last this ignored subclass comes into its own and rises to power above the mages that rule many *Shadowrun* games—vehicles aren't easily enchanted, it

seems. Other characters will find all the nifty vehicles nice, too, and referees will note that now they have a place to blow their nuyen. (Ah, the wonders of owning a vehicle. Payments, repairs, breakdowns, fear of theft, etc. Just another button to push the characters' motives.) The new vehicular combat rules are better than the original rules by far, and might prove useful for the GM wanting to throw his players a little vehicular action. After all, what's a modern-day drama without a car chase?

Special Mention: FASA actually includes an index so you can find what you're looking for. Well done, FASA people. Indices are too rare in game books.

NOTHING'S PERFECT

Given some of the slip-ups that I'm used to finding in FASA books, I was rather surprised that I didn't find more wrong with this book.

What did I find? Well, some very confusing bits about fuel-efficiency modifications from increasing a vehicle's power and mass—the way the rules read, the fuel efficiency actually goes up with power and mass! This is clearly wrong. A simple minus sign in the proper places would have solved the problem. What's a player to think when he sees a "+10%" applied to fuel "economy" per point of armor added to the vehicle? A −10% would have been more appropriate.

And the vehicle modification rules are a bit tricky. Read them over carefully before using them.

And that's it, really. For a game product, this is an A+ grade!

WHO WANTS THIS?

Shadowrun referees who want a complete rules set. Anyone with a rigger character. Anyone who wants neat vehicles to trundle around in, even if they're not rigged. And it's worth the $15.

The Arasaka Brainworm

Review by Craig Sheeley.
Atlas Games.
$7.95.
Written by Thomas Kane.
32-page roleplaying adventure for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*

The Arasaka Brainworm poses an interesting question in the world of dark future: What do you do when you have to rely on yourself, and only yourself, in a hostile situation? This adventure takes the street samurai off the street and plunks him into an environment where everyone's hand is turned against him, and there's no way out and no one to call on for help.

Initially, the street sams are hired to do a simple info retrieval from a mole—a deep spy on an island in the middle of the Pacific 1000 miles from nowhere and even farther form anywhere else. Of course, things aren't that simple—Arasaka Security protects this island, and everyone on the island knows everybody else on sight. Imagine the "small-town" syndrome, enhanced with armed paranoia. Now try to infiltrate it.

Tough enough for you? Uh oh. Once the adventurers get on the island (an adventure in itself), things fall apart rapidly. I can't reveal how they fall apart without giving away the adventure, but an evil smile crossed my face when I read about the sequence of events.

The module consists of the introductory section, which sets the PCs up to prepare for the adventure; "Getting In," which details the problems of getting onto the island; "Welcome to Johnston," covering the the intrusion and subsequent screw-up; "Layout and Security," for the referee's eyes only (maps, stats, security precautions, etc.); "Afterglow," which deals with wrapping up the adventure; and an appendix, covering the virus that's the focus of the mission.

EVALUATION

I like *The Arasaka Brainworm*. It is fairly well organized and competently documented, and it has a good map layout that leaves very few holes for the GM to plug. (There will be holes. Trust me, the players will find them! But that's true of almost all adventures.) Most importantly, this adventure is nonsequential—i.e., it doesn't have a set and immutable sequence of events that the players can't alter. The referee can comfortably wing it—and concentrate on being sneaky and smart instead of bringing out the guns and playing Terminator.

In this adventure, brains count for more than brawn. It gives the less combat-oriented character types a chance to shine. A med-tech and a netrunnner are recommended in the text. I would say that they were essential, and it wouldn't hurt to have additional runners and techs (both medical and mechanical).

On the down side, the interior art is a bit ugly—typical of the vast majority of interior art available to the gaming industry—and I was a trifle surprised to discover some character stats exceeding maximums. But on the whole, a good adventure.